

The Coastguard's Wife

Her Brighstone lad, newly wed, rolls over -
eyes turned to the window, ear tuned
like a cockle-shell to the shift of sea that flips him
from her warm pillow faster than a merman
reaching for an oar.

Walking the storm-worried child
candled in night, round and round, steps regular
as lighthouse beams she hears the scouring shingle,
fears the hurl of dead sailors against her Brighstone man.

Down sunken lanes, or primrose paths on windy days
when the woman sees the spring of teal from reed beds
by the creek, or whistling wigeon over Bleak Down
she knows the child feels the boom of surf; she waits
for the day the maroon, louder than the screaming
gulls, will call him, like his father, to the sea.

Pat Murgatroyd